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ABSTRACT

As the "middle child" between universities and K-12 schools, community colleges have often sought to carve out their own niche by embracing programs rejected by other institutions, such as non-collegiate training for business and industry. There has been growing concern, however, over the colleges' shift from a mission that balances access to baccalaureate study and skilled semi-professional education to one that increasingly emphasizes vocational and business education. The community college mission has historically included a focus on transfer, general education, workforce training, remedial education, and community services, but as leadership and legislation continue to promote the vocational aspect, especially consulting-based activity, the access and transfer mission may well be diminished. The colleges must be able to respond to diverse learning and career goals of their students and respond to the specific needs of their communities. While business training can and does meet the service aspect of the colleges, it should be recognized that these programs are not collegiate and will not fit into the educational goals of students attending to attain a degree. The number of liberal arts students enrolled in community colleges is an indication that students still appear to be seeking access to baccalaureate degrees. Community colleges may therefore benefit themselves by reconfirming their comprehensive mission, emphasizing collegiate access and transfer functions, and keeping workforce specific programming within a careful balance. Contains 47 references. (TGI)

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# Doing Education With Business and the Middle Child Syndrome:

# Promise or Threat to the Community College Mission

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Outreach to business and industry has been a mainstay of the community college mission. In fact, the two-year open door colleges have prided themselves on their willingness to offer programs and training to meet specific needs of local business whether those offerings are part of regular academic programs or specially created consultant-like "fee-for services" activities. There are reasons why they have embraced such non-traditional paths which range from the practical concerns of increasing revenue and stature to a question which focuses more on the community college collective psyche as they seek legitimacy in the American higher education family.

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## THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL FAMILY

If we view the American educational system as a family with three children - universities, community colleges, and the K-12 systems - we can begin to understand one major motivation for community colleges to engage in pre-collegiate learning programs. The problem is parallel to one that plagues many families with three children. There will , always be a middle child striving to be noticed by the parents. (Blake 1989; Dunn 1985; Ernst and Angst, 1983; Toman, 1976) The oldest child obtains immediate advantages from the age old idea of the birthright. (Altus, 1970; Adler ,1933) The youngest child is the baby of the family. It will be favored in various ways because it will always be the youngest and thus thought to be the most vulnerable; even when very large, full grown and mature. The middle child needs to develop a reason to be noticed. Sometimes those reasons become somewhat deviant; perhaps positive, (West, 1973; Bibs, 1971; Mukherjee, 1961) but still deviant within the family.

The older and younger child, will seize, or will at least appear to grab, advantages plus the attentions of the parents most quickly. Thus the remaining sibling, the middle child gains no built in birth order or familial advantage. The child in the middle just seems to be there; between the other two. Cultural traditions, emotions and/or chauvinistic attitudes will not help the middle child and may definitely harm it. If the middle child is to gain an advantage, it will have to be of its own making.

When the middle child feels it has a lower status, he or she must either accept its position or reject it. If the child rejects the less significant role, it often comes about because he or she believes his or her value has been overlooked and ignored. One way to

overcome the situation is to find ways to make the parents take notice. The reaction here can lead to some interesting, and certainly non-standard behavior, thus deviant behavior. The child will often go about gathering attention in ways that are outside of the "normal" sphere of behavior or activity of the family. (Blake, 1989; West, 1973) The child moves to cut its own unique niche which by its very nature will force the parents to take notice. It is important to recognize here that the child may not be taking an actively conscious course of action. The child can become involved in a quiet form of attention seeking to compensate for an unrecognized but persistent sense of its position in the family. The behavior need not be obvious and overt, nor need it be positive and productive but it can become so. The chosen course of behavior can be negative and self-destructive even if the child does not produce behavior which is recognizably so. The negative effects can be subconscious or may manifest themselves in the future as a result of present behavioral decisions. A most common form of rebellion is to reject the family values and traditions, then turn to areas of activity never approached by the family in the past (Ernst and Angst, 1983).

## MIDDLE CHILD SYNDROME AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

In the American educational family, the older child is the university system. It is the oldest both historically and due to its being thought of as "senior institutions" providing both leadership and example to the rest of the family. It is given the prestige, status and the support thought due its senior status. We may recognize baccalaureate colleges and universities have faults, but overlook them out of deference to their seniority. The younger child is the K-12 system. The aligning of the K-12 with the youngest child is due

to its student body and the social acceptance of its limitations as being the starting place from which learning grows and matures. There will always be continuing recognition that the "baby of the family" could accomplish more but allowances are made to permit time for growth. After all, it would be foolish to expect that the youngest should be able to do more than its youth could allow. Time is needed for growth toward reaching greater potentials. Even when growth does occur, a lesser set of expectations are placed on the K-12's simply because they will always remain the "baby" of the educational family. The community colleges are the middle children with neither the advantages of the oldest sibling nor the patience provided to the youngest. In fact, it may be argued that the middle child, the community college, is expected to not outshine or demand as much as the older sibling as well as to watch out for and take responsibility for the problems of the family's baby.

But this is a position community colleges have always been ready to accept; perhaps too ready. Their history shows they will indeed take up areas others reject. Their involvement in providing workforce specific training is the most obvious example of the attempt to break out of the restrictions and lack of status their middle child position forced on them. The direct embracing of training for work, though limiting the collegiate role, has provided community colleges a clearer sense of place and recognition in the family.

For example, until the colleges moved into two-plus-two programs designed to meet workforce needs (Parnell, 1985) there had not been an educational or public policy objective to prepare students for study at the community college. K-12 was to educate

students for university study or immediate entry into the workforce. There was no goal to bring students along intellectually far enough so that the student can obtain further skills needed for future education at the community college. This level is generally considered to be failure on the part of K-12 rather than recognizing that some students learn at differing rates with varying abilities. Not every student is ready for university study at the end of an academic program at high school. But, if the high school has not prepared the student enough to go to university, then it has failed or the student has failed. The community college will receive that failure to remediate either by default or plan. The middle child gets what is left or it finds what has been overlooked by the rest of the family. For the community college, the discovery was job-specific training in a non-collegiate mode and environment.

In so doing, the community colleges have been a major factor in workforce and community development, both economic and social. But, as a result of what appears to have been a major growth in non-collegiate offerings for local business and industry especially since 1990, they may have harmed themselves and their future mission nationally.

## Background to the Problem

For over twenty years, with added impetus the past five, (Berg, 1971; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Dougherty, 1994) there has been growing concern in some critical quarters that community colleges have been shifting from a balance in their mission between access to the first two years of baccalaureate study and skilled semi-professional education to become vocational business and industry consulting agencies. This shift led some critics

to question if community colleges are becoming something which may or may not even qualify as part of higher education ( Brint and Karabell, 1989; Grubb, 1991, 1988, 1984; Clowes and Levin, 1989; Pincus, 1989, 1986; Dougherty,1994). The current move to more fully embrace non-collegiate, consultant-like work for business and industry is a part of an almost thirty year old push on the community college mission to serve the community in ways other institutions will not. (Harlacher, 1969, Gleazar 1973-74; Myran, 1974; AACJC Futures Commission, 1988) Embracing workforce training and retraining may also have been an attempt to establish a unique niche and role in American education to distinguish community colleges as more then just a compensatory bridge between high school and university. It may have been an attempt to overcome its feeling like the forgotten middle child in the American educational family which has placed upon community colleges all the expectations society could not give to anyone else.

The primary expectations set for the university are to turn the student into a professional who can succeed in a highly skilled activity involving critical thinking and complex cognitive performance skills. Society expects the university to prepare the leaders of tomorrow in every professional field needed to function and compete successfully in the world. K-12 is expected to prepare students for university study or work. A primary central purpose for community colleges is not yet quite clear but society in general and local communities do have a range of expectations. Among them are:

- to provide the first two years of college study for students going on for a bachelor's degree;

- to provide the first two years of college study for students going on for a bachelor's degree;

- to provide general education to the mass of students who are not sure whether or not they wish to continue toward a bachelors degree;

- to offer training programs to enable students to obtain a job in a skilled area;

-to provide high-tech training to workers already employed or unemployed so they can continue to grow with the new technologies in the workplace or obtain a position in the workplace;

- to provide instruction and education to students who left high school without functional skills such as reading or computation yet need these skills to get and keep a job or try to obtain college education;

- to educate and train students for positions in business and industry;

- to develop and deliver workshops, seminars and programs to community, industry, business or cultural groups desiring specific education and/or training;

- to offer life-long learning and/or continuing education courses in areas ranging from the intellectual to recreational for the general population;

- to meet the needs of specific needs groups (displaced homemakers, people with disabilities, the elderly, recent immigrants to the community....)

- to also provide for the enrichment of the community in any and all ways possible such as the arts, social and cultural activism, community service.

- to maintain a collegial presence like a university while providing the training of a trade program and make up for the deficiencies of the primary and secondary schools.

This list is long but not all-inclusive of the expectations and demands placed on a community college and its faculty, staff and administrators. It is the very breadth and diversity of the expectations which belie the central problem in defining, or self-defining the community college. They have tried to answer all the charges with equal aplomb, and enthusiasm. They have succeeded, perhaps too well. In meeting such diverse objectives they may have become all things to all people, and thus not one clear thing to all as suggested by its critics.

Officially starting in the early part of this century as extensions of public school systems, community colleges have never fully been able to establish their collegial and academic validity on the national front as a full part of the American educational family. Simply put, they feel they have not been able to escape their origins as "grade 13" or "high school with ashtrays". They still feel characterized by too many as an extension of high school for the less well academically inclined or prepared as well as sites for training and retraining for low level, non-professional jobs. (Tharp, 1995; AACC Commission on Image 1995; Clements, 1996)). Moreover, as non-selective, open-door institutions which have touted embracing the role as remediators of those who did not succeed in K-12, they have not been able to fully establish the validity of their freshman and sophomore baccalaureate studies as the equivalent of the baccalaureate schools. Even though studies indicate the full validity of the community college education in these years (Lee, et al,

years (Lee, et al, 1993; Pascarella et al, 1995) they remain mired in the image of "second best" colleges of default (Zwerling, 1976) as opposed to colleges students actively choose to attend (Eaton, 1988).

As a result, community colleges have historically sought ways to distinguish themselves as something different and unique from baccalaureate and K-12 institutions in order to build local and national support. (Brint and Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1994) The latest, and potentially most problematic for their continued mission as part of American higher education, is the outreach to bridge K-12, business and industry, and the workforce in non-collegiate ways (Eaton, 1944). Community colleges are being urged more and more by their national leadership such as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the League for Innovation, as well as state and national initiatives such as the Business and Industry Network (1990), the AACC Workplace Initiative (1993) "The Workforce Training Imperative" (1993) and federal School to Work legislation to engage in training, retraining and "fee-for-service" activities to meet the needs of the workforce. National community college leadership also has seen working with high schools, as well as business and industry to promote job-related training as a way to begin defining a clear, defensible niche for the colleges. One such, earlier example of this push was the AACJC publication of the then AACJC (precursor of AACC)president, Dale Parnell's book, The Neglected Majority (1985). This book promoted working as partners with high schools to create two-plus-two tech prep programs for non-college bound students so they could get skilled technical jobs. The tech prep programs were forerunners for many vocational and technical school-to-work

work initiatives which have been embraced by a vast majority of community colleges ( Doucette, 1993).

But in promoting the vocational aspect of the two-year colleges, especially consulting-based activity, the access and transfer mission may well have been diminished leading to the questions of whether or not community colleges will remain a part of higher education or become something else. The movement from classroom-based education to job-related, workplace training prompted two researchers to even question " Community, Technical and Junior Colleges: Are They Leaving Higher Education?" (Clowes and Levin, 1989). Their answer was "yes". The critics do not seem to have questioned the appropriate role of community colleges meeting local economic and even workforce needs within a balanced comprehensive and collegiately-focused mission. They were not criticizing an appropriately balanced mission which integrated academic and technical studies but one which they saw as increasingly becoming lopsided toward non-collegiate work. They may well have had reason for their concern. Some community colleges are responding to discard collegiate modes to work for business and industry in ways that may leave the classroom so far behind that they could become like educational prostitutes doing whatever pleases the client for a set fee.

## A Solution Becomes a Problem

The two-year colleges began as an offshoot of pre-existing, pre-collegiate educational entities and have not ever fully escaped their origins. They evolved out of junior colleges to prepare and remediate students for university study (Trow, 1985). At first they were attached to high schools more or less as post-graduate remediators (Witt et al, 1994). As

they grew, they expanded to offer the first two years of baccalaureate study and some skilled and professional educational programs during the Depression to bring more students into classes.(Dougherty, 1995) The re-empowerment of the American Dream through the GI Bill and the Truman Commission focused on community colleges to answer the call for democratizing higher education. (Blum, 1976) The Truman Commission saw the community college as the appropriate locale to "democratize college" and meet the needs of the 49% of American youth who should get some college but not a baccalaureate degree. These students were to be given education and training to perform in semi-professional or skilled technical jobs in the private sector (Nasaw, 1976). The community colleges were quick to accept these roles since they felt they would lead to additional funds and a more defined niche (Dougherty, 1994). In the 1960's through 70's, they expanded their remedial and developmental roles to open the doors to many non-traditional populations, especially women and students of color as the civil rights movements expanded.

Starting in the 1980's, the community colleges appear to have started shifting from focusing on providing the first two years of baccalaureate study and professional education to more and more becoming like technical schools (Cohen and Brawer, 1989; Raisman, 1994,a, b) There are even some states such as South Carolina, Maine and Indiana in which community college activity is almost exclusively technical and vocational. In the late 1980's and definitely in the 1990's, there was a very strong nationally encouraged push from organizations such as AACJC (later renamed as the AACC) and the League for Innovation to strongly embrace vocational training to directly assist the

assist the workforce moving from high school to the job with programs such as School to Work, Two-Plus-Two Tech Prep and variously named workforce initiatives. On top of these efforts to vocationalize the colleges was a very strong move by national political, commercial and academic organizations to move community colleges forcefully into partnering with business and to directly involve business in making central decisions on college curriculum and direction.

The thrust was successful. In 1985, 75% of community colleges were actively involved in contract services for business and industrial training (Schmidt, 1986b). By 1992, that percentage had jumped to almost 96% of colleges offering fee-for-service/contract training (Doucette, 1994). A survey of community colleges in 1992 found that 96% provided workforce training in one form or another in 1991-92. Of particular significance is the reported fact the 71.5% of the programs were designed specifically to meet identified local employer needs. (Doucette, 1993) Of the training done, 20.2% was job specific training in a technical area for and 18.6% was in computer-related areas for specific clients. Another 14.9% was in areas of managerial and supervisory training for businesses and industries. This was a significant expansion.

Now, the national emphasis is even stronger. A review of AACC publications of the past two years such as the Community College Times will disclose that the lead articles and headlines will most often center on workforce training and business/industry initiatives such as school-to-work. Further, it is probably not a coincidence that U.S. Secretary of Commerce Robert Reich was a featured plenary session speaker at the 1994 and 1995 AACC national conferences. The AACC Community College Journal (1995)

printed the following telling statement as a highlighted emphasis in an article about partnerships with business. "Make it your business to know our business. Don't just collaborate with us...co-create. Our technicians and your faculty need to build the curriculum together, quickly. Use a strike force, not a task force. Don't tour the plant. Work in the plant"

Granted knowing the program in depth is extremely good advice if the creation of a specific, limited curriculum for a specific plant is what is being contemplated. But the suggested approach raises some concerns about the control and governance of any curriculum developed through such a highly specific partnership. Additionally, developing curriculum to supplement a specific business's training needs rather than developing it to meet a broad-based student need may well not be an educational but a consulting function. Leaving the classroom behind to provide assistance more as a "fee-for-service" program outside of the college to meet the needs of local businesses and industries may well be taking community colleges further out of academia and more deeply into functioning as consultants whose primary goal is to please the client and earn money.

There is a recognition that one aspect of the community college mission calls for it to look and act locally. Meeting community educational needs does properly include those of local business and industry. To not assist local business would not be in keeping with the larger mission. The question then becomes one of balance within the comprehensive mission. The colleges are called upon by their communities to remain inexpensive and maintain non-selective admissions while they encounter and help solve community educational, economic and even social problems. They perform these tasks admirably

community educational, economic and even social problems. They perform these tasks admirably well as partners with K-12, business, social agencies and cultural groups without the prejudicial attitudes often found in the university toward such non-collegial, non-academic activities. In so doing they may gain community support for being non-traditional but sacrifice part of their role in the academic world. They are seen as less than a baccalaureate degree college. As an ironic twist from serving community needs, they often lose academic viability and stature in the eyes of the very communities they serve. The communities turn to the community colleges for help but send their own children to four year colleges for "a real education". (AACC Commission, 1995-6; Tharp, 1995) In fact, community colleges are most often overlooked as part of the higher education sector by the media and the public. For example, just recently, Newsweek devoted seventeen pages to the costs and values of higher education in its April 29, 1996 issue but never once mentioned community colleges.

A survey done in Rockland County, NY to determine the perceived value of the thirty--five year old community college there found about 60% of respondents considered the community college not to be a "real full college" . They saw it as a place to go if there were no where else to go, if a person could not afford a university, or if someone wanted to get trained for a semi-professional job. An equal number stated they really did not know much about what a community college is. They were clear about K-12 and universities, but not community colleges (Clay Marketing, 1995; Clements, 1996.). It may well be that the diversification of mission has created not clarity of image but greater confusion both for the community and the colleges themselves.

Moreover, the diversity of student learning and career goals, (first two years of university study, business career preparation, industrial or skilled trade training, lifelong learning, specific applications training...) also confuse the educational mission. The broad range of student abilities, needs, goals, attendance patterns, socio-economic backgrounds, purposes, and ages the students bring to the classroom make it difficult to define the student body. The demands of the community with all its cultural, social, political and economic diversity and needs affect the community college mission and goals. All these factors force demands on the community college and its teachers and staff which far exceed those placed on most other educational structures which have clearer missions and goals. In turn, the diverse and undefined demands placed on, and assumed, by community colleges have direct consequences on the ways teachers, staff and administrators work, perform and define themselves. These disparate aspects exist within a very diverse mission which is currently under rapid de facto redefinition. This shift is from the push to engage more and more in non-collegiate, short term training efforts which are in conflict with the traditonal transfer focus. The inherent conflict between non-collegiate emphasis and the transfer function aids in explaining a major stress facing the colleges today to understand their role and perception within American education today.

It is important to immediately note that there is no uniform community college self-perception or worldview. The way community colleges view themselves varies as much within each college as each college varies from one another. Yet, they all must react to the specific local requirements of community, place, population and needs as well as the need to meet some prescribed curricula at a range of baccalaureate institutions students

well as the need to meet some prescribed curricula at a range of baccalaureate institutions students wish to transfer into to complete their study. Thus, community college self-perceptions are based on a wide grouping of factors which may not necessarily provide a clear mission statement. In some ways, it is no surprise that in trying to formulate an image to meet such a broad diversity of constituencies and goals, the community colleges would seek some unique programming such as business/industry training and outreach and employer-specific training as a centering factor for the colleges and their place in the larger American educational context.

These courses of instruction are uniquely written to the needs of an individual local employer, generally small businesses (Doucette, 1993; AACC, 1992). They are thus usually not part of the regular curriculum. Most likely they were not reviewed by the college's governance system to assure they met standards normally demanded for classroom education. This is understandable since the courses were designed not for a degree or a set course of study but to meet short term and specific desires of a specific employer. They were less part of an educational program than servicing a client willing to pay for the service. Once performed, the customer paid and left perhaps to return for additional servicing if the desire and need developed. It has been a mutually satisfactory exchange. The customer received services. The college received money.

Much of this training has been in the form of short-term, need-based partnerships between the college and a specific business. For example, when Medilabs, Inc. approached Rockland Community College (NY) in 1996 for some training of its workforce in teamwork and strategic planning, the College created a special non-credit

course specific to their needs and workers. The College also worked with Medilabs to write a grant proposal to go the New York Department of Labor for funds to pay for the training. The College received an agreed upon fee as a consultant. These "fee-for-service" courses were not part of the "traditional" course offerings. They were provided as part of the business/industry servicing which is part of the college's mission. They also produced needed revenues while helping a local company. They were in keeping with the mission and were an adjunct to it. The problem develops when contract learning, fee-for-service and other employee-specific services start to edge out the core collegiate mission and define community colleges out of collegiate higher education.

Business training can and does meet the service aspect of the community college mission. Pride can rightly be taken in these offerings to keep the community viable. But, it cannot be overlooked that these are not collegiate courses and may well be in variance with the actual programmatic direction of the core of students at the college as refllected in degree attainment. Granted, community colleges are very pleased to recognize that not all students attend college for a degree. They are proud to help students meet whatever personal goals they set. But, it also must be recognized that degree attainment is an indicator of core academic and collegiate purpose and outcome. Simply put, students attend college to gain the certification they need for the next step in their lives. Colleges recognize this by making the degree and the programs of study the structural and academic core of the institution. Colleges are structured and planned around degrees and programs of study through entities such as departments, core curriculum and requirements; the success of which are celebrated at graduation. As academic institutions,

academic institutions, degrees are reflections of the core values and focus of an institution actually is, and probably should be. They state why students come to college. If what students take at a college can be accepted as an indicator of the core of the instructional mission, then there is a clash which may have interesting concerns for the future of these colleges.

**Number of Associate Degrees Awarded in the Five Most Popular Fields, 1992**

| | |
|---|---|
| Liberal/general studies and humanities | 154,594 |
| Business management and administrative services | 93,762 |
| Health Professional and related sciences | 79,453 |
| Engineering-related technology | 35,861 |
| Protection services | 15,117 |

(source: National Center for Educational Statistics, 1994)

Even granting that many community college students are not motivated to receive the associate degree but attend for other reasons than full credentialling, the number of liberal arts students should be a sign for concern for community college planners motivated to seek the non-credit and non-collegiate consulting-based work for business. Even with the national focus on carving out a niche in the educational family through vocational education, students still appear to be seeing community colleges as primarily access sites to the baccalaureate degree. Moving too vigorously down a fee-for-service or non-collegiate workforce training road which seems to be the direction community colleges are being directed nationally may be counterproductive in the long run. This emphasis works against the core purpose for community colleges as shown by the degree concentration as well as public perception.

Equally important is an underlying possibility that the national leaderships push to find a niche for community colleges in the world of work may not be fully conversant with how the public may conceive of community colleges. For example, in 1995 the AACC Commission on Community Colleges National Image were told by a pubic relations firm that the focus groups they held saw the community colleges as strongest in the workforce development role. Unfortunately, the firm's results should be held somewhat suspect since the focus groups were composed primarily of "community leaders" identified through the business and/or industry role in selected communities. (AACC Commission Reports, 1995-96) Moreover, these focus group results were at odds with another consultant's data hired by AACC but who did not report until months after the first. This consultant, a fund raiser, conducted 69 focus groups throughout the nation over an eight year period and arrived at an important finding. In 51 of the 69 focus groups, the number one response (74%) was that the community college "provides accessible, affordable transfer, vocational, developmental, and continuing education". The second most common set of responses (70%) were that the two year college "is flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the community and of business/industry; enhances economic and cultural development in the area; trains and retains the workforce; brings industry to the area".

Interestingly, the community college presidents were prepared to accept the first consultant's recommendation that they formulate a national image campaign around workforce issues. Even after the second consultant's report, some wanted to fully embrace the workforce development role as the major component for the communtiy

college image. This would have extended the searching for a niche in the educational family which began after World War II. But, the vocational and workforce emphases did not fulfill the psychological needs for status in the past fifty years. They also will not settle the middle child issues. The greater status they seek could be found in the degree attainment figures as well as the findings of the second consultant as reported to the AACC Commission; both of which reflect the traditional comprehensive and collegiate role.

There is both support and recognition for the comprehensive community college mission with access, transfer and education for skilled and technical professions as the more accredited aspect of the mission. Their mission may be more fully empowered and acknowledged in the public perception than they believe. It does appear the public appreciates the full academic and vocational range of programs and offerings of the community colleges even if they say they are not fully sure what they are. Thus, it may be that the middle child lack of identification does not really, or at least fully, exist, but is a self-imposed lack of recognition and inferiority. Thus, a continued push to replace collegiate focus or expand non-collegiate workforce and fee-for-service activity may be counterproductive to the balanced acceptance of the comprehensive mission. Community colleges may therefore benefit themselves by reconfirming the comprehensive mission with the centrality of collegiate access and transfer functions and keeping workforce specific programming within a careful balance. Perhaps by focusing on their traditional collegiate strengths and accepting their role within the larger family they might gain the self-

out ways to gain attention through activity which may remove them from the family altogether.

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